LESSON – 9

THE CHALLENGED CONQUEROR
Pt. Dr. PUTTARAJ GAWAI

Look at the photograph. He is a person without eyesight, attired in a plain dhoti and spotless clean khadi full-shirt with a laced turban adorning his head, vibhuti (sacred ash) on his forehead, a sandal tilak between the eyebrows, and a Braille wrist-watch on the left hand. He has a rosary of rudrakshi round his neck. He is playing on the veena.

Can you guess who the person is? Yes, you have guessed it right. It is none other than the legendary musician Pt. Dr. Puttaraj Gawai, a picture of deep simplicity.

The word 'Gawai' means a great singer. Puttaraj Gawai is Vaggeyakara (a composer). He has created and contributed new ragas to the world of music. He

is a legendary musician, a vocalist, a gifted writer, a playwright, an instrumentalist, an ardent lover of music, a proprietor and director and a poet all rolled into one. He dedicated his entire life for educating the visually - challenged and destitute children. Though he was an embodiment of knowledge, he considered himself "putta" (small in everything). His dedication to his guru was great and it speaks of his great humility.

Devarahospet, a village in Hangal Taluk in Dharwad district, is a place of pilgrimage for devotees of Shiva. There lived a pious couple named Revanayya and Siddamma.

A boy was born to them on 3rd March, 1914 in his mother's native place, Devagiri, near Karajagi in Haveri District. They named him "Puttayya". The child was very attractive with bright eyes. The parents were very happy and their joy knew no bounds.

But providence had a different game to play. When Puttayya was not even six months old, his eyes became infected. The condition of the child aggravated and the mother tried various medicines suggested by native doctors. One such suggestion proved to be deadly in his losing the eyesight at an early age. This was a big blow to the family.

Misfortunes struck him in succession. Puttayya lost his father when he was just two.

His maternal uncle, Chandrasekharayya, took him under his care. Then came a turning point in the life of Puttayya. One day, Chandrasekharayya had been to his fields. The boy Puttayya was very sure that nobody was nearby and took his uncle's harmonium and sat

down to play on it. After sometime, returning home, Chandrasekharayya heard from a distance someone playing his harmonium. He instantly flew into a rage. He could not tolerate others handling his harmonium. He came closer. He was filled with wonder and delight when he heard the sweet melody on the harmonium. It was his nephew Puttayya! Tears of joy rolled down his cheeks and he embraced the boy.

Puttayya's grasping power was a matter of wonder to Chandrasekharayya. He learnt everything about music within a short time from his maternal uncle. But it was evident that there was in him an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. The uncle thought of a competent teacher to teach him.

He took him to Pt. Panchakshara Gawai, the pontiff of Veereshwara Punyashrama. Under the paternal care and expert guidance of Panchakshara Gawai, Puttayya mastered both Hindustani and Carnatic music and soon became UBHAYA GANA VISHARAD. Puttayya also learnt to play many musical instruments such as the Veena, the Tabla, the Mridangam, the Dilruba, the Shehnai and the Sarangi and was recognized as an outstanding musician. He attained a high degree of mastery over all of them.

His Guru Pt. Panchakshara Gawai also initiated him into the study of literature. He arranged for the teaching of the celebrated works like *Shabara-Shankara Vilasa*, *Rajasekhara Vilasa* and the *Jaimini Bharata*. Puttayya also learnt Braille - the script for the visually challenged.

Having mastered Kannada, Hindi and Sanskrit, Pt. Puttaraj authored over 80 outstanding works which include puranas, biographies, drama, commentaries and texts on music.

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